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OCT 9 1986

ILLINOIS DOCUMENTS

CARE OF FLOWERING POTTED PLANTS



CHRYSANTHEMUMS
POINSETTIAS
AZALEAS
LILIES
HYDRANGEAS
POTTED BULBS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE

CIRCULAR 980

In recent years flowering plants have been sold all through the year for gifts, for holidays, for special occasions, and for decoration in homes and offices. A few years ago pot-grown chrysanthemums were flowered only during fall and early winter; now this popular plant can be purchased in any month of the year. Azaleas are also being offered throughout the year by some growers.

This development has taken place because of improvements in greenhouse growing facilities, new chemicals, new varieties, and new knowledge about how these plants grow and produce flowers.

This circular emphasizes ways to keep the plants growing and flowering well. After the flowering is finished most people discard the plant. Some want to keep the plants beyond the initial flowering period and to bring them back into bloom again. This practice is not usually very successful, but for those who want to try it, some suggestions are included.

TEMPERATURE

Most of our living areas (homes, offices, sick rooms) have temperatures between 68° and 75°, a little warmer than temperatures maintained in the greenhouse. These higher home temperatures hasten the development of flowering plants and thus shorten the time you can enjoy them. For longer flower "life" select a plant with both developing buds and some flowers, and then keep the plant in a cool place.

Avoid placing plants in "hot spots" in your home or in areas where there are frequent warm or hot drafts, such as are likely to occur in buildings heated with forced hot air. During the winter, protect the plants from cold drafts, and don't place them near doors that are often opened or by windows that are not tight. During the summer, protect them from the air-flow of an air-conditioner.

If you have a room that is cooler at night (60° to 65°), move the plant into it. If not, lower your thermostat to 68° or below.

LIGHT

Plants in flower should be placed in a bright area of the room, close to a window with a south, east, or west exposure. Protect the plant from direct sunlight, however, for this can cause a flowering plant to deteriorate rapidly. The heat from the sun causes the soil to dry quickly and the plant to wilt severely unless water is applied often enough.

WATER

It is impossible to give a satisfactory formula or rule of thumb for watering flowering plants. During flowering the amount of water used is often increased. The low humidity normally found in our living areas also increases water use.

Examine the soil at least twice a day. If it is dry to a depth of 1 or 2 inches, apply enough water so that the excess drains from the hole in the bottom of the pot. If the soil is extremely dry, make a second watering so that the whole soil ball will be moistened.

Do not allow the plant to remain in a container or saucer of water. Too much water in the root zone usually damages the roots permanently, and decreases the blooming period of your plants.

FERTILIZER

Most of the flowering plants we buy do not need additional fertilizer during their blooming period. The grower has fertilized them enough so that additional fertilizer is not needed for at least four to six weeks after they are brought home. By this time you may expect to discard them.

To keep the plant after flowering, you will need to fertilize. A liquid fertilizer solution is a convenient way to do this. Buy a concentrated mixture and dilute it with water. Follow directions for mixing the fertilizer and how often to apply the diluted solution.

POTTED CHRYSANTHEMUMS

These are the most popular potted flowering plants sold in the Midwest. The flowers should last at least two weeks if given good care, but often last much longer.

1. Check the plants for water each day.
2. Place them in a bright or well-lighted location but not in full sunlight.
3. If possible, keep the temperature during the night at 60° to 65°.

The varieties used for flowering potted plants are usually not suitable for planting in Illinois gardens. The plants will grow in the garden but the flowers will not develop until after the middle of November. Early frosts and cool night temperatures during late September and October hamper the development of the flower buds. It is usually just as well to discard the plants after flowering because they do not develop well when lifted from the garden and brought into the home.

HYDRANGEAS

Hydrangeas are very popular flowering potted plants during the spring especially at Easter and Mother's Day. The potted type has larger flowers than the hydrangeas commonly grown outdoors as woody plants. They can be kept for several weeks in the home before the blooms deteriorate. Because of the large foliage and large clusters of flowers, hydrangeas need special care.

1. Never allow the plants to dry out. Check the soil several times a day. If you plan to be away for a day or so, place the plant in a shallow pan of water or cover with a plastic cleaning bag. Do this only when necessary, not as a regular habit.

2. If a plant is severely wilted, submerge the pot in a bucket of water to thoroughly soak the soil ball.

3. Keep the plant in a cool, light area of the home, so the flowers will hold longer.

In southern Illinois the large-flowered hydrangeas can be planted outdoors in a protected location. After mild winters the plants will flower. After a severe winter, the tops may be killed back, but the plants usually persist.

In northern Illinois these plants are not hardy. Many people keep hydrangeas in the garden by protecting them extensively around the top buds, using a mulch over the entire plants or styrofoam covers.

Since production of buds for spring flowering starts the previous fall, do not prune after July 15.

EASTER LILIES

The Easter lily needs little special treatment.

1. Do not overwater. Check daily and be sure the pot does not stand in water.

2. When the flower opens, carefully remove the yellow anthers. Do not get any pollen on the stigma and petals.

3. Keep the lily in a bright, cool place. This will lengthen the flowering time.

4. Remove faded flowers.

When all of the blooms have faded, reduce the watering so that the plant will gradually dry. Cut off the dry stem to within a few inches from the soil. After the danger of frost is past, plant the bulb in a protected place outdoors at a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Often the lily will flower again in late summer or early fall.

Easter lilies are not normally hardy in the Midwest, but will persist in the garden for several years if protected with a mulch. It is not practical to repot them and bring them back in the house.

POINSETTIAS

Since new long-lasting varieties have been developed, the poinsettia has become one of the most popular flowering plants, especially red varieties for the Christmas season. White, pink, and variegated pink and white varieties are being grown for use throughout the year.

Following these few suggestions will keep the plant in good condition for a longer time.

1. Keep the plant out of hot or cold drafts.
2. Check watering daily. Do not allow the pot to stand in water.
3. Keep the room temperature between 65° and 70° . It is not recommended that the plant be placed in a cool room at night—keep it where the temperature is always above 60° .

Poinsettias can be brought back into flower, but the procedure is more involved than most people want to bother with. After the bracts (colored leaves) have fallen, cut the plant back to within 6 inches of the soil. When all danger of frost is past, place the plant outdoors in a protected area. Fertilize and water through the summer. In August cut the stems back, leaving 3 or 4 leaves per stem.

Before frost bring the plant into the home and put it in a room with temperature around 65° to 70° . Keep it in a bright location. From the last week of September until Christmas, the plant should be exposed to only natural daylight. Any amount of light during the natural dark hours at this time of the year, even the light from a lamp, will delay flowering. During this period, cover the plant at night or keep it in a room without lights.

AZALEAS

Azalea varieties that are used for flowering in pots come into bloom easily after careful manipulation of temperature and light. To extend the flowering period, follow these suggestions.

1. Keep the plant in the coolest part of the house (60° to 65°) as much as practical.
2. Place it in a well-lighted location.
3. Keep the plant well watered.
4. If the plant dries until it is severely wilted, submerge the plant in a pan or bucket of water until the bubbles stop coming to the surface.
5. Remove faded flowers.
6. Use a liquid fertilizer regularly if you plan to keep the plant.





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The varieties of azaleas used for pots are not hardy in the Midwest. If you want to try to save the plant, wait until after danger of frost, then plunge the plant, pot and all, into the soil in a shaded location. Leave the plant outdoors in the fall as long as possible, but bring it in before frost. Keep it in a cool location (as low as 45° to 50° if possible, but don't let it freeze) until about Christmas. Bring the plant into a warmer place in the house, and the buds will begin to swell. Flowering will not be as profuse as when it was purchased, but most homeowners are satisfied with the results.

Azalea plants require acid fertilizers. These are available at garden centers and flower shops.

POTTED BULBS

Tulips, hyacinths, narcissi, crocuses, and grape hyacinths are often sold in pots during winter and spring. These plants should be purchased in the bud stage for extended flowering in the home. Follow these suggestions for taking care of them:

1. Keep the plants in a cool place, around 60° to 65°.
2. Avoid a sunny location. The sun will hasten flower development and shorten the flower life.
3. After flowering, remove the spent blooms.

When flowering is finished, reduce the water and allow the plants to mature and the leaves to dry gradually. Cut off the dry foliage and remove the soil from around the bulbs. Store the bulbs in a dry place until fall. Then plant them in the bulb garden during the fall.

You can get further information on flowering plants from Circular 801, Flowering Gift Plants: Their Care and How to Rebloom Them. This circular and other publications on flowers are available from any county extension adviser or by writing to the Office of Publications, College of Agriculture, Urbana, Illinois 61801. County advisers are usually located in the county seat. They are listed in the telephone book under "_____ County Cooperative Extension Service."

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March, 1968

Cooperative Extension Work, University of Illinois, College of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.
JOHN B. CLAAR, *Director*. Acts approved by Congress May 8 and June 30, 1914.

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